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Patriot or spy?

The CIA has entered the controversy over allegations that the deputy to Sir William Stephenson, Canadian director of the wartime Intrepid Intelligence network, was a double agent for both the Nazis and Russia.

Charles "Dick" Ellis was named by Chapman Pincher, a British journalist, as the double-agent.

In a detailed account of the CIA's origins, classified "Secret" until now, the official CIA historian Thomas F. Troy, quotes the first effective wartime U.S. secret-intelligence chief, David Bruce, as stating that without the help of Ellis "American Intelligence would not have gotten off the ground."

When the Pincher allegations were published last April, friends and colleagues of Ellis (who died five years ago) counter-attacked. They accused Pincher of spreading Soviet KGB "disinformation" aimed at breaking down trust within the Western intelligence agencies and between allies. Yet Igor Gouzenko, the Russian defector, stuck to his story that Ellis fitted the description and the code-name he had seen in Moscow Centre. Gouzenko, a cipher-clerk in the Russians' Ottawa embassy, has always maintained that someone senior in British intelligence had failed to transmit his detailed warnings of KGB agents in high places.

Ellis was born in Australia in 1895, became an accomplished cellist and won scholarships to university. At Oxford in World War I, he volunteered to join British forces fighting in Russia to prevent Germany exploiting the Bolshevik revolution.

This led to a career in espionage. "I had been 20 years in the professional intelligence service when in 1940 London sent me to Intrepid's headquarters in New York to help maintain secrecy," Ellis wrote later. In a book on his Russian experience, written in 1963 (The Transcaspiian Episode) he set out to "counter Russian propaganda" that the British intervened against the Bolsheviks along with other Western anti-Communist armies. Ellis was always deeply concerned about the falsification of history.

But Pincher, the London journalist, claimed Ellis spied for the Russians and the Nazis before World War II, and that he made "an abject confession" in 1965.

Yet when Ellis died 10 years later, among old colleagues at the funeral was the director-general of the British secret-intelligence service, Sir Maurice Oldfield, who spoke to Ellis's daughter about his outstanding services.

In Australia, however, Pincher's accusations provoked headlines. For Ellis had been invited back to his native land in the 1950s to help build Australia's own ASIS espionage service. If the Pincher tale was true, then Ellis fell into the category of men like Philby who turned Western intelligence agencies into arms of Soviet intelligence simply by occupying senior posts.

The Pincher "revelations" included the charge that another chief of British counter-intelligence (MI-5) Sir Roger Hollis, really worked for the KGB. The British prime minister, Mrs. Thatcher, has officially cleared Hollis's reputation.

Now it would seem the CIA has joined in the debunking of a report dangerous to internal confidence. In a preface to his history, Troy writes: "(It) was aimed at satisfying the need of employees of the CIA ... for a comprehensive and detailed account of the agency's origin." The book is to be published commercially next year by Ballantine of New York.